

About The Female Art Maker, and other working identities

A body as a machine

As I start to write this text, I am in an interesting place to consider the two terms, art and work in my practice. By this I mean a period that I am currently living, where I have just started labour work. A traditional, pin factory work where I contribute into the capitalistic system as a piece of a puzzle, a mechanical machine. I can't fully compare my job in a restaurant by placing myself in the working conditions of an assembly line worker in the late 1700 in England, but our bodies do have similarities. Explicitly here, I consider our bodies as machines to see the similarities of them. What is expected from me, and how I need to behave as a woman, is highly related to the brand of the restaurant that I am working in and for. I am a mixture of Fordist worker and a virtuoso in the political and economic system of (western) immaterial labour. My identity is moulded to serve the customer base, as well as to the fact that I am expected to do my work as if I would not be at work. To appear casual, and to give the expression that I am enjoying my time, is essential. I need to appear as casual and friendly in my work, yet, have a full control of all the technical aspects and patterns of labour that keeps the restaurant going. In contrary to the assembly line worker, I do an extra work to hide the traces of the labour.

When I am in the restaurant as a worker, I am a piece of a fake play, where my intelligent is appreciated only when it's social, and it is possible to transfer into a commodity to the capital. My identity is my productivity, my skill of selling beer, food, and cool hipster atmosphere to people who have climbed high enough on the ladders of the current system to have the privilege to buy readymade food made from organic ingredients.

I do this type of work in order to finance my future art making. This is not optimal, since I would love to invest all my time into art making, but this situation is extremely interesting to observe and investigate through work, art and labour. Because I work with this type of work in order to finance my "real" work, what meaning has the word "work" has in this discourse? Where is the work? And furthermore, what happens to me when I juggle between these two different bodies, as I am embodying both the 21 century version of assembly line workers body and the non-productive,

rebellious art makers body. I am currently in a project where nine women collectively process and explore a body of a witch, so I have a fruitful opportunity to dig into these two different bodies/ possible extremities through Silvia Federici's book *Caliban And The Witch* (2004) as a base of my arguments, thoughts, ideas and struggles. I will focus mainly to the chapter three in the book; *The Great Caliban: The Struggle Against the Rebel Body*. In addition, I use Paolo Virno's text *A Grammar of the Multitude, Day Two; Labour, Action, Intellect* (2004) and his notion on performance- artist being the new type of worker in post-Fordist production as ground for this essay on multiple altered bodies, art, work and labour. I do not attempt to solve a problem of my identity and body being split into both serving the capital, and into critiquing the capital (yes, it often appears to me as problem, struggle and frustration) but more accurately, sustain hope. I attempt to give some substance and material to these two identities to co-exist and inform each other, having hope that my priority, art making, could ideally benefit and not suffer from this split.

A body of a witch and The Female Art Maker

Silvia Federici describes the witch in the Introduction of *Caliban And The Witch* followingly:” Most important, the figure of the witch, who in *The Tempest* is confined to a remote background, in this volume is placed at the center-stage, as the embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy: the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeha woman who poisoned the master's food and inspired the slaves to revolt.” (2004, p. 11)

The body of the witch is rebellious, uncontrollable and resisting the capitalistic system. With magic, the witch has access to substance impossible to measure, and turn into commodity, therefore the body of a witch could be described as unproductive. It doesn't produce value, it doesn't exist in order to serve the capital. The body of a witch is not dangerous because of its nature, it is dangerous because it deliberately refuses to fit into a capitalistic system. To that system, the witches body is dangerous and unpredictable.

The female body of witch in today's political situation is empowered, necessary and it exists in art. I use the witch as a metaphor for the female body that I admire, and wish to embody in the years to

come. The body, that I will call here The Female Art Maker, doesn't exist to serve food, drinks, structures or men.

The Female Art Maker is by nature strong, determined, uncontrollable and powerful body. It appears as frustrated, angry, well-articulated, critical and intellectual. This loud female is needed in the field of contemporary dance right now! If Federici's witch is magical, uncontrollable, resisting and didn't submit into wage labour, the 2017 Female Artist certainly takes a lot of characteristics from the witch. For me this body is revolutionary and it is in the process of shaking away the chains of oppression and white male supremacy.

Federici's witch stays out of the capitalistic system, whereas my Female Art Maker operates from within, through critiquing the system.

Paolo Virno sees a performance artist as a new type of worker in post-industrial labour. According to Virno, performance artist doesn't produce a product, and is therefore dependent on a witness, audience. He refers to performance artist as virtuoso in a chapter 4.7 *Virtuosity in a workplace* by saying that: "Virtuosity, with its intrinsic political dimension, not only characterizes the culture industry but the totality of contemporary social production. One could say that in the organization of labor in the post-Ford era, activity without an end product, previously a special and problematic case (one need only recall, in this regard, Marx's uncertainties), becomes the prototype of all wage labor." (2004, p. 62) In this post-industrial labour, or post-Fordist era to borrow Virno's words, the assembly line worker still exists, but the labour has changed from being a mechanical body with one specified task and physical mind into market where the immaterial work, ideas, communication, intellect and marketing skills are the commodities being sold. For Virno, language is the most important commodity that ties politics and economics together: "According to Guy Debord "spectacle" is human communication which has become a commodity. What is delivered through the spectacle is precisely the human ability to communicate, verbal language as such." (p, 61)

The Female Art Maker takes believes in collectiveness and in communication, and shares Virno's idea of multitude, language and communication as the core of new way of working, infused in politics in a western society.

Thoughts about identity, work and art in a form of self-interview

By returning to the questions from the beginning of this essay, I will give you, dear reader, more personal thoughts on the three different bodies I have introduced here (the physical machine body, the linguistic body that is communicative, collaborate and produces immaterial labour e.g. through art making and The Female Art Maker) as I consider possible scenarios on how identities that these bodies suggest, could harm/benefit my personal art making practice. Because I have a personal preference on self-interviews, I have written this part in that format.

What happens to my body, when I am a physical machine that sells food and drinks nonstop for nine hours?

- There are very specific things that happens to my body. I have a strong sense of “me” before I enter my workplace, but I quickly enter a body of a machine. I would compare the change with riding a bike in hometown vs. riding a bike in a city one has never visited before. When I enter my workers body, when one rides a bike hometown, I rest on the functionality of physicality, and my intellect shifts between providing circumstances for my body to be as efficient as possible and sustaining social lightness in my communication. This body is exhausting, and distant from what I would identify as some type of essence, or my “identity”. Me, is secondary, my productivity is the identity that I contribute with and that is mentally and physically demanding to do. This body is draining, yet economically necessary.

In relation to work and art making, do you think that there is an, authentic, real body that exists as neutral?

- I have chosen to use the word “body” as almost a synonym to the word identity. I struggle with the complexity with the idea of different performed identities, (right now I wish I had time to read more Butler) but I see something interesting and beneficial in comparing different ways of working, with different bodies. I do believe, that The Female Art Makers body is in its specificity and through its ideology embodying a different type of reality, than

the restaurant worker me is ever in the circumstances provided to it able to experience nor explore.

These different bodies play with the idea of multiple, transforming through environment. I do hope, that there is a neutral, yet, I don't mean neutral as any more true or optimal, than fake. My dancer identity is more established than the restaurant worker identity, and therefore, my dance practice as work, and the body I enter when working as a dancer or art maker blends with my identity fluidly. Yet, I resist the idea that it would make it more real and authentic. I do carry hope that The Female Art Maker would one day be my neutral body and identity, because I would have found a way to invest all my time to it. Right now, I feel weak, too insecure, not wise enough to fully embody The Female Art Maker. Political and economic struggles that this body must face, are too depressing and overwhelming to handle "as a full-time job". In this struggle, I seek help from the restaurant worker me, that can rest on the stupidity of simple action, that provides enough money to sustain somewhat okay circumstances to everyday living. This for me provides energy that I can put in the work of The Female Art Maker. To work as The Female Art Maker full time, could mean freedom from the environment that makes me modify my identity, believes, dreams and hopes to fit employer's needs, and I am curious to see what My Female Art Maker screams when it is strong and loud enough to be heard, and has the courage to decline a monthly pay check.

Where is the work?

- As I have now sat here for four+ hours thinking about different bodies, me, art, dance and work while sometimes mimicking the actions copied from the restaurant work (as I sit here and write), as well as visiting the witches body, (the one that I work with in my current dance practice) combined with The Female Art Maker. Through this thought process I have travelled now, I argue that work is everywhere. It exists in these different bodies as well as in the transformation and fluidity of them. Work is where the environment they appear in is present, and in the reality that I claim these different parts of my identity to exist.

Work in my art practice is to be aware and to stay hungry, not for the organic hipster food that I sell besides my art making, but for the possibilities and problems addressed in this essay. Big part of my artistic work is to feed The Female Art Maker with courage and experiences. Work is a word that sounds active and demanding, and it is exactly that. I identify with work as a choice to be active and productive, in earning money and/or as sleeping in a studio space or drinking wine with colleagues. I refuse to let the capitalist system define, when my body is at work and when it's free from work. I want to live in a way, where work is a huge source of energy for me instead of draining necessity. To get there, and here I put my trust into The Female Art Maker, I need hope, and a lot of... work.

References:

Federici, S. (2004). *The Caliban and the Witch*. Brooklyn NY, Autonomedia,

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